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A

SERMON,

PREACHED DECEMBER 29, 1799,

IN THE

NORTH MEETING HOUSE,

Salem,

THE LORD'S DAY AFTER THE MELANCHOLY TIDINGS WERE RECEIVED

OF THE DEATH OF

GENERAL

GEORGE WASHINGTON,

WHO DIED DEC. 14, 1799.

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A SERMON.

ISAIAH xxviii. 26.

For his God doth inſtruct him to diſcretion, and doth teach him.

ALL who acknowledge God to be the Creator of man, and that He commands his birth in the diviſion of the earth he chooſes, together with the peculiar circumſtances in which he is placed, will hear our text as the voice of indiſputable truth when addreſſed to any individual of mankind. "His God doth inſtruct him to diſcretion, and teach him:" He affords him both ſpeculative knowledge, and ingenuity to improve it to wiſe and uſeful ends.

How far *minds* may be equal in an independent ſtate, is one of thoſe abſtruſe queſtions which *we* have not abilities to aſcertain.

But

But this we know, putting aſide all our own exertions, there are innumerable differences between men—their taſtes, their diſcretion, their capacity of inſtruction, and their improvements—which we cannot but think are greatly owing to cauſes which we can neither controul nor direct—to the peculiar formation of our bodies, to the climate where we are born, the circumſtances in which we are ſtationed; to peculiar conjunctures favourable to the diſplay of our particular abilities. The objects of knowledge and diſcretion to which ſome are paſſionately attached, and which they learn to comprehend with great eaſe, others turn from with indifference and diſguſt: in their nature and uſe it ſeems impoſſible to inſtruct them, unleſs we could communicate to them powers which they have not, or have but in a very feeble degree. Some are born into, and are continued in, ſituations which are unfavourable to their inſtruction, though their faculties are ſtrong; they are like the diamond in the quarry, which cannot diſplay its brilliancy for want of light and the poliſh of the artiſt. Great numbers, no doubt,

of

of this claſs die in every quarter of the earth, who neither ſuſpect themſelves their abilities of eminence and uſefulneſs, nor are eſteemed by thoſe around them above the rank of ordinary men. Some, though they have been in an indulgent ſituation for the acquiſition of knowledge, and the diſcreet uſe of it; and, had they been called to action in circumſtances favourable to their uſefulneſs and fame, would have made a conſpicuous figure in the world, and been diſtinguiſhed bleſſings, have by an uniform ſeries of events been hindered any ſtriking exhibition of themſelves. If theſe remarks are juſt, and we feel their force, muſt not promptly ſay, with deep-felt humility, and lively gratitude, that "God doth inſtruct us to diſcretion, and doth teach us," while with vigorous zeal we devote ourſelves to his honour and ſervice? Did not He give us our conſtitution of body, united with the ſtrength of our minds, and the livelineſs of our imagination? Has not He bleſſed us with the health neceſſary to our enjoyment, and the ſucceſsful improvement of our abilities? He appoints the place of our birth, either

in barbarous climes which knowledge never enlightened, the very air of which enervates the ſoul; where, if any, there is but a feeble ſtimulus to the exertions which render men great, amiable and good; or in a ſituation which foſters both bodily and mental vigour, and where all cauſes conſpire to render us the ornaments of human nature, and the bleſſings of mankind. He orders "the times and the ſeaſons," in the exerciſe of his ſovereign wiſdom, ſo as to bring forward our diſcretion and various knowledge in thoſe ſtriking attitudes which raiſe our reputation and fortune high, and give us a benignant influence upon the worth and happineſs of our fellow men; or, continues us in circumſtances which doom us to concealment and inaction, while we are conſcious of thoſe excellent powers which, indulged, would greatly benefit our country, and glorioufly diſtinguiſh ourſelves.

Nor may we conclude, as we ſhall be apt to do if we think but ſuperficially upon this ſubject, that, becauſe we are ultimately indebted to God for our diſcretion and mental improvement, it is therefore wholly unneceſſary we ſhould labour to acquire

them

them by the exercise of the original powers He gave us, which grow with our growth, and render us capable of increasing judgment and knowledge: For He—and certainly He has a right to convey his undeserved blessings to his creatures in the mode He chooses—has seen fit inseparably to connect these together. God has seen fit to command us "to lift up our voices for understanding, and search for wisdom as for hidden treasure," whom we are sacredly bound to obey, by the principles of duty, and the motives of honour and happiness.

Having made these observations, always important, I shall now lead you to a consideration of several ways in which the ALL-WISE AND BENEFICENT BEING, who rules over all, "instructs men to discretion," and teaches them how to increase the security and welfare of the societies to which they belong, and the individuals with whom they are intimately connected, and to secure and promote their future happiness as accountable beings. I shall conclude with several practical reflections upon the effects which the liberal distribution of His invaluable gifts in our NATION should have

upon

upon our minds, affections and actions. Nor ſhall I fail to make honourable mention of the Great and Good Man who has lately "fallen in our Iſrael, and for whom the whole land ſo ſincerely mourns."

We conſider, then—

I. Several ways in which the ALL-WISE AND BENEFICENT BEING, who rules over all, "inſtructs men to diſcretion, and teaches them" how to increaſe the ſecurity and welfare of the ſocieties to which they belong, and the individuals with whom they are intimately connected; to ſecure and promote their future happineſs as accountable beings.

FIRST. Our text is ſpoken by the prophet of the Farmer; and therefore AGRICULTURE will claim our attention before any other kind of inſtruction which God has given our race. By agriculture in a large ſenſe is meant a judicious method of preparing the earth for the reception of ſeeds, and dreſſing the fruits ſhe yields ſo as to be fit for the food and nouriſhment of man. This was, after man became ignorant and barbarous in any of thoſe abodes to which he wandered from the ſtate of civilized knowledge, however familiar the buſi-

neſs

neſs may have become to us, who have by long experience been better inſtructed, eſteemed the moſt uſeful art of which he could be made maſter. In the mere ſavage ſtate we ſhould be in frequent want of the neceſſaries of life; we ſhould be obliged to ſeek a precarious and unplentiful ſubſiſtence with inceſſant labour; and ofttimes would our moſt painful ſearches be wholly in vain: we ſhould eſteem him, therefore, in this ſtate of mortification and want, the moſt eminent of our number, and hail him our firſt benefactor, who ſhould teach us the diſcretion neceſſary to cultivate the ſoil, and cauſe it to yield a ſufficiency of food to ſatisfy the cravings of hunger, and invigorate our bodies.

In the ſhort hiſtory we have of our firſt parent there are expreſſions which admit not of an eaſy explanation, unleſs we ſuppoſe he was peculiarly taught of God this moſt uſeful art. Before his creation, it is there ſaid, "there was not a man to *till* the ground." But, uninformed either by obſervation of other men, or by his own experience, how to perform this important work, whence

could he derive his knowledge but from his Maker? After his creation, we are told alſo, "the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dreſs it, and to keep it." This knowledge he no doubt communicated to his immediate deſcendants, and they to theirs. Yet ſome of his children, in the ſucceſſive ages ſince his day, have through misfortune and diſtreſs ſunk into the pure ſtate of ignorance and barbarity, and loſt, almoſt entirely, this beneficial art. The wiſe and good, who have entered amongſt tribes of men in ſo degraded and afflictive a condition, have taught them agriculture, as a moſt efficient means of their civilization, and of increaſe to the comforts of their lives, as tenants of the earth. Duly appreciating the benefit, they have eſteemed themſelves under ſuch immenſe obligations of reverence and gratitude to them for their leſſons, and the happy alteration they have made in their modes of life, that they have hailed them divine perſons, who have viſited the earth for their good. They have conſecrated their memory with religious honours, though they were in reality only men better taught than themſelves

themſelves by God, who alone deſerves adoration. Agriculture indeed ought ever to rank in our minds as a moſt valuable ſpecies of knowledge communicated to us by the Father of our ſpirits. Under her benignant influence "the wilderneſs becomes a fruitful field, and the deſert bloſſoms as the roſe;" man lives without conſtant dread of want, and is far more agreeably fed and clothed; his body and his mind both are pleaſingly and honourably employed in obedience to her direction; and in a way which tends powerfully to the common and univerſal good of his race with whom he has any communication.

SECOND. Military diſcretion ſeems, in the courſe of things, to have been taught men by their Divine Inſtructor, next to the knowledge how, profitably, to cultivate the earth. Univerſal hiſtory proves whereever tribes of men have by their knowledge and induſtry acquired a fruitful inheritance, there have been other tribes around, who, either from the motives of ambition and power, or the deſire of more plentiful accommodation, have attempted, when artful meaſures have failed of the

end,

end, to gain the dominion over them by violence. We may exclaim, Alas! why do men increaſe the miſeries of their preſent exiſtence by the harſh calamities of war, when evil enough are our days without them? Why do they ſhorten each others' lives, when they will quickly go down to the grave, though they have nothing ſingular to haſten them? We may pray, and we ought to pray with fervency, that the juſt, the mild, the benevolent religion of Chriſt may prevail, and men learn war no more. We may join our reaſonings and advices to ſucceed its complete influence; and we ought to do it, becauſe no order of things would more advance the tranquillity and happineſs of mankind. But ſtill God hath given us abilities to learn the regular proceſſes, and the various ſtratagems, of attack and defence: "He hath taught our hands to war, and our fingers to fight." The courſe of the Divine Providence ſeems alſo to prove, that we muſt make uſe with ſpirit of the armour which is given us, in every juſt and honourable method, during the continuance of the preſent corruption of human nature, until it is eſſentially

altered

altered for the better, unleſs we are willing to be oppreſſed, to be ſlaves, and miſerable. Hence we find, that upon neceſſary occaſions men in general are eaſily rouſed to war, and ſoon learn to perform its duties, as well as bear its hardſhips. Nor doth the Wiſe and Beneficent Being, who rules over all, and tenderly regards his injured creatures, fail to raiſe up for them on ſuch emergences intelligent commanders, and celebrated generals, to guide and direct them.

THIRD. After men have taken up their abode together in a ſituation which they have choſen, enjoy a fair and good inheritance, and are able to defend themſelves in their poſſeſſion, ſtill they need intereſting inſtruction from God, their great Teacher. If they are at all worthy their lot, they will wiſh to be acquainted with conſtitutions of civil government favourable to their freedom and happineſs; and with the peculiar motives which, placed before the minds and paſſions of thoſe raiſed to their adminiſtration, ſhall render them content with their legitimate reverence, honours, and ſupport, while with unremitted fidelity they

exert

exert themſelves for the public ſafety and happineſs. With extenſive, beautiful and luxuriant territory, with numbers and martial ſkill equal to their defence and aggrandizement, while alone, they may yet mourn the choiceſt bleſſings of ſociety. But, when to theſe are added well-choſen and equal governments, carried into effect by well-improved, juſt and patriotic men, they then have as much ſecurity and enjoyment as public bodies of men can have in this ſtate of imperfection. Yea, wiſe and equal government, with intelligent, faithful and kind rulers, ſoftens the harſheſt climates, fructifies barren ſoils, inſpires man with the love of country, and cauſes him to rejoice in circumſtances naturally calculated to diſpirit him, and render him habitually unhappy.

The knowledge which produces this admirable order is ſlow in its growth, and ſparingly diffuſed amongſt the inhabitants of the earth; owing either to indiſpoſition on the ſide of thoſe in power, or to the neceſſity and indolence of their ſubjects. Until within a ſhort period of time a well-balanced government has not been contemplated by the

human

human mind, like other objects which are intimately connected with the improvement and felicity of man. The governments which illuſtrate this idea are rare, amidſt the innumerable ones which would be made uſe of to ſhow, in a pointed view, how vaſtly important to the dignity and happineſs of mankind that it ſhould be univerſally realized, in the authorities which govern them.

There is perhaps in all civilized countries, bleſt with the means of good education, a ſufficient number of wiſe and faithful men, who, invited from their retirement, and patronized, would produce forms of government in theory excellent, and which, in operation, would yield them quietude and freedom, order and proſperity. If they are not brought forth to this good work, through the influence of cauſes ſo commanding that it would be imprudence and madneſs to counteract them, the evil muſt be borne with reſignation, as an evil which the Supreme Ruler ordains or permits, in abatement of their worth and felicity. But if this failure is owing to their negligence, and unworthy attachment to their individual

dividual intereſts, or the intereſt of any particular order to which they belong, all they loſe and ſuffer muſt be charged to a degree of criminality which deſerves his rebuke and chaſtiſement.

FOURTH. COMMERCE and the ARTS are cheerfully embraced and improved by individuals and nations in ſituations which are favourable to their acquiſition and growth. Commerce they prize a fruitful ſource of private and national wealth, which they dearly love for the diſtinction, ſplendour and varied enjoyments it ſo liberally confers. The arts increaſe their neceſſaries and conveniences, and greatly embelliſh human life; they are therefore objects of their ſtrong deſires. And who, that paſſes over the chart of the world with attention, but will be convinced that, wherever the Father and Benefactor of men has allotted them habitations indulgent to commerce and the arts, he has given them, though in different degrees, diſcretion and ſpirit to gain and advantageouſly exert themſelves in their improvement?

FIFTH. Nations, in proportion as they become civilized, and engage in the profitable and ornamental

ornamental buſineſſes of life, eſteem the means of a good and uſeful, a more improved and liberal education amongſt the important bleſſings which their God confers upon them. As the ſtages of ſociety advance, we find we are not accompliſhed for our condition, unleſs we have the knowledge of language and figures. Without theſe, we may have pleaſing perſons, agreeable qualities, and ſound underſtanding; and yet ſhall be comparatively deſpiſed. We cannot, though every thing elſe ſhould favour us, riſe beyond very lowly circumſtances. Yet a young man, who is only maſter of theſe branches of knowledge, and yet riſes to eaſy circumſtances; who has mental induſtry, and has ardent wiſhes to know all that the moſt enlightened men know, may riſe to their ſtate of intellectual improvement. Such examples, however, are very uncommon. Nations well inſtructed therefore in the beſt-appointed means of public and private knowledge, connected with individual reputation and enjoyment, as well as the general ſecurity and welfare, have made ample proviſion

for the higher grades of education, which thoſe may improve who have inclination and taſte.

Sixth. God has taught his children of mankind the divine and moral knowledge they poſſeſs, which tends to the purification of their hearts, and their progreſs in virtue; which bleſſes them, whenever it has its ſuitable effect upon them, with peace and joy in this ſtate, and prepares them for higher felicity in future ſcenes of exiſtence. This he has done in ſundry ways, and in different proportions, as has ſeemed beſt to his unſearchable underſtanding. Some he has inſtructed in theſe important truths only by their reaſon, conſcience, and moral feelings, aided by the labours of philoſophers. Holy men, righteous patriarchs, and inſpired prophets, have been his teachers to a different diviſion of the human race; while others, in which number we are, through his diſcriminating bounty, are more highly illuminated by Jeſus, the Great Light of the moral world. The deſign of this varied inſtruction is to encourage us to virtue as our higheſt health and happineſs, to excite within us an expectation, notwithſtanding

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ing we muſt periſh here, yet that we ſhall live for-ever hereafter in a ſtate of juſt retribution; an expectation which communicates ſuperior vigour to the motives of virtue, and the diſſuaſives from vice. However incompetent we may be to judge why; however firm our conviction that the Judge of all the earth can be neither unjuſt nor cruel; yet we muſt acknowledge the diſciples of Chriſt are far better taught in religion and virtue than the reſt of their fellow-creatures have been, or are now; have more powerful motives and aſſiſtances to well doing; have a future ſtate of reward and puniſhment placed before them in a much clearer, more ſplendid and more influential light.

Thus I have conſidered mankind "inſtructed to diſcretion, and taught" by their God, in ſeveral views which are calculated to inſpire us with the livelieſt ſentiments of gratitude and love to Him for his goodneſs, and to engage us to ſerve Him with conſtant fidelity. I proceed, as was propoſed in the ſecond place—

II. To ſeveral practical reflections upon the influence which the liberal diſtribution God has made

made in our nation of his invaluable gifts, ſhould have upon our minds, affections, and manners.

First. When we conſider the degree of knowledge of our national intereſts, and diſpoſition well to improve it, which God has kindly communicated to us—ſhould we not addreſs him with unfeigned thankſgiving and praiſe?

Agriculture, commerce, military and naval ſcience, accompanied with rapidly-increaſing numbers of hardy ſons; a juſt and enlarged acquaintance with civil obligations and rights, and therefore of the line which forever diſtinguiſhes liberty from licentiouſneſs; conſtitutions of government which are the genuine offspring of ſuch knowledge, adminiſtred by men of our own election, and removeable at our choice, whenever they betray their truſt; advantages of education, riſing gradually from the loweſt to the higheſt form; a religion pure and beneficent, which frowns upon vice, and encourages piety and virtue with thoſe alarming conſiderations which tend to render us good citizens of particular ſocieties here, and of the great ſociety hereafter formed out of

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"every nation, kingdom, and tongue;"—Theſe, theſe are now operative cauſes, in the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, which will, unleſs we baſely counteract them, render us a virtuous and happy, a great and powerful nation. Often ſhould we meditate upon theſe rich and undeſerved bleſſings of the Divine Providence and Grace; and, whenever we do, we ſhould ſay, with exulting and grateful ſpirits, "Bleſs the Lord, O our ſouls, and let his praiſe be continually upon our lips."

SECOND. We ought ever to remember with honour and affectionate gratitude thoſe who, though now removed from this world by the wiſe providence of God, yet have paſſed through life "inſtructed to diſcretion, and taught by Him," and have uniformly exerted their abilities for the ſafety and proſperity of their country.

Be this, our hearts immediately rejoin, thy praiſe, O WASHINGTON! The grave now ſhrouds thee from our ſight! No more ſhalt thou be inſtrumental on earth in doing us good! But we will ſtill draw thee up before us by the aid of imagination; we will behold thee with increaſing ſatisfaction

tisfaction and delight: never will we behold thee, but we will praiſe thee!

General WASHINGTON was truly a great and good man. While hiſtory records the truth, his character will ever ſtand ſuper-eminently high; and in every country where her pages are read he will be eſteemed and admired. But the view of him, which muſt moſt endear him to us, is that of the Father of this People, their conſtantly active and powerful friend, both in the quietude of retirement, and amidſt the threatening evils of war. Though, at home, independent in his circumſtances, happy in his family, reſpected and loved by all around him, yet, whenever called upon by his country, he has cheerfully reſigned eaſe, and enjoyments which were dear to him, and devoted himſelf to her intereſts. Call after call he has never diſobeyed. His fortitude has borne him through hardſhips oftentimes very ſevere. He always exerted his good ſenſe, his amiable qualities, his military ſkill and bravery, to render his nation independent and proſperous. He was a great farmer, he was a friend to commerce and the arts,

a friend

a friend to uſeful education and literature, a friend to chriſtianity; to the purity of heart and excellent manners which ſhe enjoins—*The Man* predeſtined in the counſels of God, which take in all ages, from the beginning of time, until time ſhall be no more, to be at the head of the new empire in the new world: an empire which cannot fail to riſe to great celebrity while its rulers and people continue to follow his wiſe and good example. He died with the ſame greatneſs he had lived. We are told, by an authority which we cannot diſpute, "His laſt ſcene correſponded with the whole tenour of his life. Not a groan, not a complaint, eſcaped him, though in extreme diſtreſs. With perfect reſignation, and a full poſſeſſion of his reaſon, he cloſed his well-ſpent life." Yet, no doubt, with fervent prayer, at this awful ſeaſon, with more fervency than he ever before experienced, he failed not to entreat the forgiveneſs and mercy of his God—and added ſtill—O Great Protector of men, and Friend of human happineſs, continue to preſerve and bleſs my country! Shall we ever forget affectionately to remember and praiſe this

man?

man? No—each one of us ſhould reply for himſelf—"If I forget thee, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth."

THIRD. Could this great and good perſon audibly addreſs our nation, aſſembled in the act of mourning for his departure, would he not thus addreſs us?—My countrymen and friends! I more delight in your freedom, ſtability and happineſs, than in any thing human! The ſabled pulpits—the mourning bells—the ſlow-ſounding artillery—the ſad countenance ſo univerſally ſpread amongſt you in conſequence of my death, I eſteem high teſtimonials of your reſpect and affection for me. But the beſt and moſt ſincere reſpect ye can pay my memory is, the treaſuring up my advices in your hearts, joined with obedience to them in your lives. *Let no arts perſuade you to looſen your* UNION. *Treat all other nations with juſtice and kindneſs; but impreſſively remember, this is your nation, and ſacrifice not her intereſts from predilection to any other. Be economical, induſtrious, punctual. Take care that the fear of God, and thoſe works of righteouſneſs, are a-*

mongſt

mongſt you, the fruits of which "are peace, quietneſs and aſſurance forever." Can we hearken to more ſalutary advice? Can we more properly teſtify our eſteem and love for our departed Chief, than by ſteady obedience to his excellent counſels?

FOURTH. If we improve with fidelity the knowledge and advantages we enjoy, we may firmly hope we ſhall never want ſtateſmen and military commanders "inſtructed by their God to diſcretion, and taught" how to defend us in time of danger, and lead us on to continued ſafety and proſperity. From the PRESIDENCY through the various important departments of GOVERNMENT we have perſons of approved talents and integrity to rule over us, at the preſent time. Who will queſtion the ſkill and bravery of our Land and Sea Officers whenever they ſhall be called into action? "Our Fathers have told us" upon how many occaſions God appeared for their deliverance when there was ſeen before them no human reſource of ſafety. His loving kindneſs and tender mercies have repeatedly been diſplayed towards this people during our own experience. Why then ſhould we miſtruſt his continued protection and bleſſing?

No doubt He will continue our friend and bountiful benefactor, until we basely forsake our duty and our happiness.——I conclude.

My conclusion will be in honour of JESUS CHRIST. He was the Wisdom of God in the most emphatical sense of the terms. For our sakes he left the highest honours of heaven; "he became a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted," that he might enlighten, purify and save us. We ought therefore to venerate, love and obey him with far more reverence, affection and zeal than we do any other instructor and friend in our form. The MEMORIAL of his death and benefits some of us are soon to enter upon. I pray God there may soon be a larger number to "do this in remembrance of him."* His religion affords us the highest consolation and joy upon such instances of mortality as we are this day peculiarly called to mourn. With respect to himself he says, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and

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* It was Communion Day.

I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." With reſpect to his followers he ſays, "I am the Reſurrection and the Life;" and aſſures us, all the juſt ſhall be raiſed incorruptible and immortal. When his diſciples began to degenerate, and grow leſs mindful of his inſtructions, he commanded his beloved John thus to addreſs the churches: "I heard a voice from heaven ſaying unto me, Write, Bleſſed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: yea, ſaith the Spirit, that they may reſt from their labours; and their works do follow them."* May theſe aſſurances rejoice our hearts when we contemplate the wiſe, the good, and the great, under the dominion of death: may they engage us all, in our ſeveral characters and relations, to act a wiſe, good and chriſtian part here, that we may hereafter, in our ſeveral meaſures, partake with them in their joys, through the mercy of God in Him who loved us, and died for us.

AMEN.

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* There was ſolemn Muſic adapted to theſe words after the Sermon.